

Blizzard Roars Through Region

Residents Rise to Challenge

By Lisa Matte

The Blizzard of '97 roared into town with high winds and heavy snowfall Tuesday, but when all was said and done it was apparent Duxbury rose to Mother Nature's challenge.

Trees toppled under the weight of the snow and power outages left residents throughout town without electricity, but local officials reported only a few serious incidents.

"We were well prepared," said Police Chief Charles Mazzone. "Our responses were timely. I think our preparation for the impending storm

caused us to be ahead of things despite the terrible weather."

Storm preparation included staffing patrol cars with two officers instead of the usual one officer per car ensuring immediate back-up if necessary.

Mazzone said the department fielded 100 emergency calls during a 24-hour period at the height of the storm. That's up from an average of 30 calls during a routine 24-hour period. That increase in the

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A snow plow clears a path at Hall's Corner after the Blizzard of '97 dumped close to two-feet of snow in town.

Staff Photo by Chris Bernstein

Blizzard Batters Town

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number of emergency calls was due in part to electrical outages in Marshfield.

From 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, Mazzone said 911 calls to Marshfield were routed through Duxbury where emergency response personnel recorded the information and relayed it back to Marshfield using their one available operational telephone line.

One of the more dramatic snow-related incidents in Duxbury involved a 40-year-old resident whose foot became caught in his snowblower as he cleared his property. Fortunately, he was not seriously injured.

David Devellis, of 240 Temple St., recalled the incident from his home Thursday where he was recovering from his run-in with the snowblower. He said the quick response of a local emergency rescue team may have saved his foot from more serious injury after it became caught between the auger and the sidewall of the snowblower.

"They came really quick," Devellis said. "I think that helped getting the blood back into my foot."

Devellis, who was wearing heavy boots at the time of the incident, said his footwear may also have helped save his foot from further injury.

"I had on really heavy-duty hiking boots," he said. "I think that helped save my foot. It's not broken or cut up at all -- just swollen and sore."

On a more serious note, Fire Deputy Wayne Sjostedt said Duxbury firefighters responded Wednesday to a medical emergency just over the town line on Caswell Street in Marshfield. Rescue workers administered cardio-pulmonary resuscitation at the scene to a man estimated to be in his mid-70's who had apparently suffered a heart attack. The man was pronounced at the hospital.

Sjostedt said the department was still responding to storm-related medical emergencies Thursday morning.

"We're still running," he said. "People are pushing themselves just a little bit more than usual."

Fire Chief William Harriman said cooperation among municipal departments helped the town through the snow emergency.

"After a storm, we can sit back and reflect on just how good an organization we have," he said.

Public Works Director Wally Tonaszuck said heavy snow caused six of the 30 trucks called in to clear roads broke down during the height of the storm. Trucks were temporarily out of service due to a variety of problems including broken plows and mechanical failure.

"That just makes the whole operation take longer," Tonaszuck said.

While final tallies were not yet available, Tonaszuck said snow removal costs from the Blizzard of '97, in addition to snow removal expenditures to date, will likely

cause the department to exceed its snow removal budget for this year.

Harbormaster Don Beers said the storm caused minor coastal flooding, but little property damage. Tides at Duxbury Beach ran about three feet above normal reaching the fence at the dunes.

Beers said clearing the road to Gurnet Point was a priority during the storm even though year-round residents at that outpost are usually well-prepared for inclement weather.

"There was a tremendous amount of snow down there blocking access to and from Gurnet," Beers said. "There are about 240 homes down there, but only about 10 families are there year-round and they're really acclimated to this type of weather."

"I worry more than they do," he said.

Beers said boats in the harbor took off for safe havens prior to the storm.

"All the boats took off," he said. "We hide during storms...We have a real exposure problem in Duxbury, but there is 30-miles of shoreline with plenty of nooks and crannies to hide boats."

As the clean-up continued Thursday morning, Commonwealth Electric spokesperson Cindy Angus 573 Duxbury customers were still without power. She said power is expected to be restored to all customers throughout Plymouth County by Friday afternoon.